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Paradoxes in social work practice: mitigating ethical trespass' by Merlinda Weinberg.

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The aim of this compelling book is to 'expose the extensive and, at time, injurious disciplinary practices acted upon young mothers by social workers who, for the most part, espouse a desire to contribute to liberatory practices on behalf of this client group. I wish to bring out the pain that accompanies the lives of these young women, as well as that of workers that...are trapped within disciplinary regimes that often perpetuate marginalization and punishment' (P26). The book, without any doubt, achieves its aim, via rigorous and analytical explanations of *why* social workers need to have a thorough-going critical understanding of their own positions of power, of their unintended role in upholding and perpetuating oppressive neoliberal doctrines of individual responsibility and of their duty to promote social change. They do this within interpersonal relationships with clients and by acts of resistance – *thus* reducing ethical trespass.

The book is based on a series of in-depth interviews with five social workers in Ontario, Canada, all of whom worked with young single mothers who were at risk of having their child 'apprehended' or received into care. Each chapter uses case studies of the workers and clients to illustrate and understand a practice framework (for example, discursive fields; micro, relationship based practice; and macro, structural influences) and to explore the inevitable 'ethical trespass' that results. The case studies unravel how social workers interpret the paradoxes referred to in the title within the particular framework. Examples of paradoxes are care and discipline, more than one 'client', being non-judgemental versus the need to make judgements and equality versus equity.

The theme of discourse was, in my opinion, the most interesting of all the analyses. How social workers interpret and understand client behaviour and attendant paradoxes, through discourses such as liberal, reactionary or revisionist/oppositional perspectives, was fascinating and illuminating. It also resonated with recollections of social workers and students I have known over the years as well as with my own practice, when I have witnessed, or experienced, a particularly strong belief in a discourse playing out in either punitive or emancipatory practice. So, for example, Jannie, (a worker) responded to Shari, a young mother, as an 'irresponsible young woman, a child bearing children,' thus reflecting a reactionary discourse. In contrast, Frieda (worker) understood her client's difficulties in terms of 'unreasonable demands and expectations of service providers, rather than due to ....intrinsic intrapersonal or interpersonal difficulties' in line with a radical revisionist and oppositional discourse. The hopeful message here is the social workers have a choice (albeit a restricted one) in the discourse they choose to

understand a situation. This means that the discourse least likely to result in ethical trespass or the perpetuation of oppression (radical revisionist) is indeed an option for workers.

The chapter on micro relations, or the individual level of practice, untangled judgements made in the worker-client relationship (again, depending on the discourse being employed), highlighting how judgements about issues such as the young mother's desire for pleasure, fun or respite, can be very negative. It is accepted that judgement is indeed necessary, but that the effects of discourse, class, race and emotion cannot be ignored. This relates explicitly to a paradox concerned with judgements vs non-judgementality.

The consideration of macro relations includes the wider structures that social workers operate within, including austerity/social inequality, lack of resources, managerialism and individualisation. The author contends that given the power and influence of these macro influences that fact that they are significantly absent from workers' narratives is 'striking.' Not seeing that challenging or trying to change those structures is part of the social work endeavour, leads to social work practised at the individual level only – thus perpetuating and colluding with those structures. The author demonstrates a sensitive understanding of how and why this happens but also draws out examples of workers using 'discretion and creativity, and (taking) risks to work around constraints.'

The chapters on discourse, micro and macro relations lead the reader to recognise the inevitability of ethical trespass. The subsequent chapter then explores how this can be mitigated. The first section on interpersonal, relational strategies (linked to the micro level of practice) includes ideas such as attentiveness to privilege, for example one worker recognising the middle class entitlement to privacy and lack of surveillance, in contrast to the young mothers whose every action is scrutinised. Another is empathy and understanding – taking a humble 'there but by the grace of god go I' position in relation to clients. Other strategies, linked to the macro level of practice are considered as those employed by the 'responsible traitor'! I liked this definition, because the 'traitor' is conspiring against the formal, oppressive power structures within which they must work. They are *resisting*. Strategies include not using power, taking action under the radar, speaking out against the hegemony and advocacy.

My only criticism of the book is that ethical trespass might have been defined and explored more fully at the outset. I occasionally found myself wondering in what way the issue under discussion was explicitly 'ethical trespass.' I think this might have been because ethical trespass was discussed as one of several 'tools of post-structural theory' rather than being considered as the central theme in the book. It also played out as one of several analytical themes, so was not, perhaps, given the prominence the title promised until Chapter 5.

To conclude, the book certainly did indeed expose the disciplinary practices enacted, even with the best of intentions, by workers upon the young women they worked with.

Just as importantly, the reader really understood the accompanying pain of the women's lives and the difficulties they faced. I found myself spending time thinking about some of the material in the book, and about the author's very deep, comprehensive and sensitive analyses of the issues, which I think is testament to the book's power and impact.

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